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New York

President: Mr. Holkeri ..... (Finland)

The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Agenda item 9 (*continued*)

General debate

The President: I give the floor to His Excellency The Honourable John Briceño, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Natural Resources and the Environment of Belize.

Mr. Briceño (Belize): On behalf of the Belize delegation, I extend my congratulations to you, Sir, on your election to the presidency. Your vast experience in international affairs will greatly aid in our deliberations during this fifth-fifth session of the Assembly. We are enriched by the presence of our newest Member, the Republic of Tuvalu; we welcome Tuvalu to our United Nations family with the assurance of Belize's cooperation and support.

The recently concluded Summit, which produced a progressive and far-reaching resolution, has set the pace for our deliberations during this general debate. Although the goals are ambitious, their achievement is crucial to the future of the United Nations. In his brief address to the Summit, my Prime Minister stated:

> "we are called to a new appointment with history: to bring democracy to global governance, to share a better and more productive future where all can live in dignity and peace." (*A/55/PV.3*)

Together with the goals put forward in the Declaration, this sets before us an agenda for our way forward.

In moving forward, we must begin by rededicating ourselves to upholding the fundamental principles of our Charter, principles which seek freedom from fear and want in a world where discrimination and hate are eradicated and the right of all people to live peaceful, quality lives is realized.

These ideas are as relevant today as they were 55 years ago. Despite the many advances we have made, many of us continue to allow our differences to lead to conflict, which results in overwhelming suffering and hinders human development. We must avoid these costly conflicts, for without peace we cannot grow.

At its inception, this institution recognized that peace and the elimination of war were essential to human development. Although we seem to have reduced the likelihood of another global conflagration, we continue, at the regional and local levels, to allow our differences to divide us, resulting in overwhelming suffering, which further hinders progress and development.

As a global institution, we must actively work to end all conflict. Our peacekeeping efforts must therefore be proactive and efficient. Our forces must protect innocent women and children; provide refuge to those who seek to promote principles of democracy; and rise up against rogue individuals and organizations that threaten to undermine democratic Governments. To achieve this, let us first commit ourselves to reinforcing the preventive capacity of the United Nations peacekeeping forces.

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Belize regards peacekeeping operations as an important component of the United Nations. We agree that for our forces to be effective, they must be well equipped and capable of defending themselves. We continue to meet the financial commitments assigned to Belize based on the principle of capacity to pay. We welcome the recent Brahimi report, which is progressive and takes a comprehensive look at our peacekeeping efforts. My delegation supports the recommendations it advances.

Belize adheres to the principle of the peaceful resolution of conflicts, and in this spirit continues to work with Guatemala to arrive at a negotiated and peaceful resolution of our differences. Belize will comply with the recently agreed framework established through the Organization of American States.

For some time now, this institution has engaged in a conversation on development for the future and, more specifically, on globalization. For developing countries, globalization, as it exists today, poses serious concerns that seem to fall on the deaf ears of those who continue to push us along what is obviously a destructive path. While we welcome the promises of this new economic order, we continue to fear globalization in its current form, for what we have seen so far is neither responsible nor sustainable. It is not sustainable because those who lead the way seek only the advancement of their personal interests.

The proponents of globalization advised that market liberalization would lead to prosperity. We were encouraged to transform our economies and create more effective and efficient government. We have tried, and continue to try, to do so. However, our call for assistance with this transformation has not always been heard. However, much of what has been asked of most of us, we have done. The fact that today in Central America and the Caribbean every nation is legislated by a democratically elected Government and that we have opened our borders, markets and lifestyles to others, demonstrates our commitment to transparency and effective governance.

In Belize, we have done our part to ensure equitable development. We enjoy a vibrant and working democracy where 85 per cent of our voting population exercise their franchise to vote; we have an open economy where all are encouraged to participate; and we have formed partnerships with civil society to address social needs and protect our precious environment. We have been responsible, yet all we see of globalization is the threat of the elimination of our current economic sustenance. If this is the legacy of globalization, then those of us who have suffered at the hands of this new order must ask if globalization today is responsible, if it is good. We continue to believe that it can be.

(*spoke in Spanish*)

In the current economic order, small economies such as ours can aspire to a productive future only if the architects of this new modality provide us with the necessary assistance. Developed countries must commit themselves to a process of globalization that is not only free, but fair. Just as they request the opening up of our markets, such institutions and the administrators of globalization must be more open, democratic and representative. Thus, just as we work with civil society to help us to deal with our political and social needs, they must work together with the international civil agencies so that the needs of the poorest can be provided for. We will never achieve the objective of just world if poverty continues to affect our people. The eradication of poverty is our moral duty.

(*spoke in English*)

We agree that true sustainable development cannot occur without the protection and preservation of our environment. This must be a path that combines the efforts of all nations. We in Belize understand that we have a global responsibility to protect our natural resources. That is why we are signatories to the Framework Convention on Climate Change and are in the process of signing the Kyoto Protocol. However, our efforts can be effective only if others are equally committed. We encourage our developed partners to continue to honour the commitments they made in Rio to significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions in a timely manner. Currently, over 40 per cent of Belizean land is under protected status, our precious coral reefs are closely monitored and our tropical rain forests carefully managed. Together with local non-governmental organizations, we are seeking an adequate balance between the protection of our natural resources and the fulfilment of the development needs of our people, while agreeing that our environmental protectionism must work in harmony with our developmental needs.

Much has been accomplished over the past year. On social issues, we reaffirmed our commitment to the development of women during the Beijing + 5 conference. The Copenhagen + 5 conference addressed the need for greater social development and, together with our partners in the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), Belize actively participated in the Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons

(NPT). Belize continues to push for an end to the shipping of nuclear waste through the Caribbean Sea.

These successes, however, should not distract us from the suffering and injustices still being endured by millions of people. In Africa the situation in Angola, Sierra Leone and the Democratic Republic of the Congo concerns us. The spread of the HIV/AIDS virus is alarming; we must do what is necessary to assist those afflicted.

We are troubled by the situation in Timor. The recent events, which resulted in the death of United Nations peacekeeping personnel, were tragic. We also learned of the death of another United Nations official in Guinea. We condemn these acts, and join with the Secretary-General in expressing our condolences to the families of those who gave their lives for the cause of peace.

Belize joins others in support of the Middle East peace process. We continue to support the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination. Likewise, we call upon this Organization to recognize the desire of the 23 million people of the Republic of China on Taiwan for the opportunity to contribute and participate in the work of this Organization and other international bodies.

The Millennium Declaration, adopted by our heads of State and Government, reminds us of our responsibility to protect those fundamental values such as freedom, equality, solidarity, tolerance, respect for nature and responsibility. It calls for collective action to be undertaken by developed and developing nations to advance the cause of peace, protect our children and preserve the planet for future generations. These are goals that can be achieved through greater inclusion and genuine concern for each other. We must find new ways of thinking to help us reform these institutions, which create inequality and therefore divide us. Let us commit ourselves to reducing redundancy, eliminating waste and refining our responsiveness to Member needs, but let us do it quickly.

The United Nations is our truest form of global representation. It possesses the capacity to elicit the best from all of us. Together, our ability to accomplish these ideals set out in the Millennium Declaration is possible. Let us rededicate ourselves to its fulfilment.

The President: I call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia, His Excellency Mr. Seyoum Mesfin.

Mr. Mesfin (Ethiopia): Allow me, from the outset, to extend warm congratulations to you, Mr. President, on your election to preside over the fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly. I would like also to express our appreciation to your predecessor, Minister Theo-Ben Gurirab, for the able manner with which he discharged his responsibilities as President of the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly.

I wish also to take this opportunity to express our sincere appreciation to our Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for all the efforts he has been making to make the United Nations equally relevant to all of us. I wish, in particular, to congratulate him on the success of the Millennium Summit, which we are hopeful will be a landmark for more meaningful and enhanced cooperation among nations.

We have indeed been encouraged by the well-deserved emphasis that was given to Africa and to Africa's predicament at the Millennium Summit. It is our hope that the Summit may have helped create greater determination for cooperation with the peoples of Africa so that Africa may make real progress in addressing the challenges of development, peace and stability.

The problems of Africa are defined by two very closely related challenges. Africa's development continues to be arrested by problems of insecurity, instability and lack of peace. On the other hand, it appears unrealistic to expect durable peace in Africa without hope in the future that could be brought about only by visible indications of possibilities for progress.

In both areas, Africa has not had the necessary support commensurate with the complexity of the challenges it has faced. It might be necessary to hasten to add here that indeed Africa itself might not always have taken advantage of available opportunities for making progress, and that we might sometimes have squandered real opportunities for breaking out of the vicious cycle of poverty and lack of peace and stability.

While this may be partly true, the significance of the missed chances that Africa has allowed to pass should not be exaggerated. It is far from the truth that Africa has enjoyed sustained, resolute and all-out support, either in the area of economic development or in the sphere of peace and security. On the other hand, it is precisely this type of cooperation that is required by many in Africa to be able to embark on sustainable

economic development and growth. But whether with respect to debt relief, or to declining terms of trade, or to all aspects of the challenges of and obstacles to development, the types of cooperation made available to our countries have always been limited as well as entangled with all kinds of conditions which have been far from helpful.

Like all regions of the world and like all countries, Africa and African nations should and must assume primary responsibility for what happens in Africa in general and in individual African countries. But at one time or another in their history, most regions of the world and most countries have had occasions to rely on international solidarity and cooperation as a catalyst for creating conditions for development and stability.

But Africa's fate has been different. For whatever reason, it has been easier to lose hope with respect to Africa than to give the continent the benefit of the doubt; this, even when little has been done to help Africa address the real challenges it is facing in a variety of areas.

This is not only in the area of economic development. We have seen the same thing taking place with respect to the need for Africa to promote respect for the rule of law and to create conditions for peace and stability. Africa is also being marginalized in terms of the universal applicability of the principles of international law. It is our hope that Africa will be judged by the same standard in this regard. Otherwise, there can be little chance for peace and stability in our continent.

We say this from experience. There is no effective substitute, if opportunities are to be created for the peaceful resolution of situations of crisis in Africa and for a quick and an appropriate response by the international community to violations of international law. Peace can never be promoted through appeasement of aggression or by creating the impression that, depending on circumstances, on where they take place and to whom they happen, some acts of aggression can be tolerated.

We in Ethiopia have, only a week ago, celebrated our New Year. We have entered the year 1993 with confidence that it will be a year of peace and progress. Our people have made the commitment to resume the task of economic development with full force, a task which was rudely interrupted two years ago when our country became a victim of aggression.

It is also in this spirit that we are proceeding with full commitment to put behind us the crisis we have had with Eritrea. Even before the deployment of peacekeepers, contrary to experience in other places, the cessation of hostilities has held for months now. We look forward both to the deployment of the peacekeepers and to a speedy conclusion of a comprehensive settlement. All those prepared to contribute to this effort should rest assured that what they should expect from Ethiopia, its people and their Government, is the fullest cooperation. For us, agreements concluded are made to be respected, not violated. In any case, what our people wish to be identified with, fully and with no ambiguity, is peacemaking, not war-making. We hope that we will have the opportunity to work for peace and for economic growth and development.

There are few who need the blessings of peace more than the people of Ethiopia and of our subregion. As much as our people refuse to see aggression rewarded at their expense, they have, on the other hand, never been wanting in demonstrating full commitment to peace and legality. Our people will never jettison this noble tradition.

Ethiopia also takes its responsibility for peace and stability in our subregion very seriously and in Africa as a whole. In this regard, we have been enormously encouraged by the developments with respect to the peace initiative on Somalia under the auspices of President Ismail Omar Guelleh of Djibouti.

It is Ethiopia's hope that what has already been achieved in Djibouti will be built upon and that the momentum for peace and national reconciliation will be maintained. We are convinced that if the remaining problems are handled with realism, wisdom and mutual accommodation, there is little doubt that the people of Somalia will very soon be able to put behind them the 10-year nightmare they have faced. I would like, therefore, to take this opportunity to call on all concerned to make this newly created opportunity for peace in Somalia, and for the restoration of the Somali State, irreversible. The process should not be allowed to be held hostage by those who may not be prepared for national reconciliation. Nor should it be endangered by a failure to be sufficiently accommodating and

sufficiently patient. This is what the international community should encourage.

The opportunity now created in Somalia should not be allowed to slip away. This could easily happen if all attention is focused on seeking international legitimacy rather than internal national reconciliation. It would indeed be a tragedy and a recipe for further bloodshed in Somalia if efforts are not made to build on the peace and stability that have already been achieved by some regions and parts of Somalia. The issue of Somaliland, for instance, requires great sensitivity and a sense of enormous responsibility. Whatever has been achieved in Djibouti is going to be tested by how well the peace and stability that some parts of Somalia have achieved is preserved.

For Ethiopia, and for Somalia's neighbours, these are critical issues. The formal stand we will be taking with respect to the evolving situation in Somalia will depend on how these issues are addressed by those who now have the chance to affect the destiny of the people of Somalia. While we wish them well and promise them our full cooperation, we also ask them to use this historic opportunity with a full sense of responsibility and wisdom.

Let me take this opportunity to also state that Ethiopia, along with its Inter-Government Authority on Development (IGAD) partners, will continue to do the maximum possible for peace and national reconciliation in the Sudan. It has always been our firm conviction that the Declaration of Principles provides a just and realistic basis for reaching a settlement on the crisis in southern Sudan. It is also our view that a broader national reconciliation in the Sudan can easily be achieved on the basis of democratic principles and mutual accommodation. Ethiopia will continue to be committed to peace in the Sudan on this basis and to cooperate with all those who have the goodwill to contribute to peace in our subregion.

Let me reiterate: Ethiopia will do the maximum possible for peace and durable stability in Africa as a whole, with the full knowledge that without peace we in Africa will have little chance to ensure a better future for our peoples.

Before concluding, I would like to say a few words on how vital it is that the reform of the Security Council be completed as speedily as possible. The reform of the Council is critical for the credibility of the United Nations and for its increased legitimacy. As matters stand now, it is only too obvious that not many believe that the work of the Security Council is conducted with sufficient transparency. In fact, there is a growing conviction that the Council is being less and less representative and more and more distant from the sentiments of the majority.

This situation, we believe, needs to be rectified. This can be done in two ways. First, by ensuring that there is equitable representation of all regions of the world on the Council. Secondly, it is also important that the work of the Council be made more open and its decision-making more transparent. The interests of peace and security will be better served if the Council is more transparent and more open to the views of others, most particularly to the views of those directly affected by its decisions.

It is our earnest hope that the United Nations will be more relevant to all in the twenty-first century, and in equal measure, than it has been in the past 55 years. This is not an unrealistic objective, but it requires the commitment of all, big and small.

The President: I give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, His Excellency Mr. Igor Ivanov.

Mr. Ivanov (Russian Federation) *(spoke in Russian)*: The Millennium Summit has given all of us the priority task of establishing a new and equitable world order — an order which would meet the interests of all and every member of the international community and ensure adequate solutions to the problems with which the twenty-first century is confronting us.

I am convinced that in this era of globalization and enormous scientific and technological progress, humankind can and should have a comprehensive and forward-looking strategy. While in the past century human civilization's main task was that of survival, today we are confronted with significantly more difficult problems which are much more varied in terms of their scope and orientation.

The strategy of survival must give way to a strategy of sustainable development aimed at ensuring the prosperity of humankind. It must be based on the recognition of the indivisibility of international security, the use of modern scientific and technological achievements for the benefit of the entire international

community, and a gradual closing of the development gap between the various States.

These ambitious goals can be achieved only through the preservation and strengthening of strategic stability in its very broadest sense.

Strategic stability means further progress in the disarmament process, reliable prevention of the spread of weapons of mass destruction. Today nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation are no longer the subject of exclusive interaction between Russia, the United States and other nuclear Powers. What is needed is the effective involvement of multilateral United Nations mechanisms and the entire world community in those processes.

The outcome of the Millennium Summit provides additional opportunities for the achievement of a major breakthrough in disarmament in the twenty-first century. This will require consistent joint efforts aimed at strict compliance with the agreements already concluded; a step-by-step reduction and eventual elimination of weapons of mass destruction under effective international control, and the limitation of other types of armaments; and prevention of the arms race in new spheres.

The time has come to give a new impetus to the work of the Conference on Disarmament, which has proved in practice the effectiveness of multilateral diplomacy under the auspices of the United Nations. Russia advocates the resumption of substantive work at that forum on major issues on the disarmament agenda.

The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) provides an indispensable international legal basis for nuclear disarmament. This has once again been reaffirmed in full by the 2000 Review Conference. Russia will work to ensure that the decisions of the Millennium Assembly promote the practical implementation of the agreements reached during that Conference. It is precisely for that purpose that the President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin, put forward an initiative on the development and implementation, under the auspices of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), of an international project designed to phase out the use of enriched uranium and pure plutonium in the civilian nuclear energy sector.

We are satisfied to note the increasing number of States acceding to the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). Its speedy entry into force is in the interests of the entire international community. Having ratified the Treaty, we call on those that have yet not done so to follow suit.

We expect that the United States will follow Russia in completing ratification of the Treaty on the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms (START II), which will help make it operational. We are ready to actively continue the process of nuclear disarmament and to move towards the conclusion of a START III Treaty with an even lower threshold of nuclear warheads — down to 1,500 units. But this will be feasible only if the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty remains intact. It is universally acknowledged that this major Treaty concerns the vital security interests of the international community as a whole. Its preservation is a key element of global stability and a strong barrier to the arms race in regard to nuclear weapons, missiles and other weapons of mass destruction.

Russia will be introducing a draft resolution in support of the ABM Treaty. We hope that, as was the case last year, our initiative will receive broad support within the United Nations.

A peaceful earth needs a peaceful outer space. At the Millennium Summit the President of Russia proposed the convening in Moscow of an international conference on the prevention of the weaponization of outer space, to take place in the spring of 2001, when the fortieth anniversary of the first manned flight to outer space is to be commemorated. We hope that this proposal will be actively supported.

Strategic stability means reliable safeguarding of international information security and counteracting the use of scientific and technological achievements for purposes incompatible with universal progress and the maintenance of international peace. Aware of the great importance of resolving these most urgent issues, Russia will introduce for consideration by the General Assembly a draft resolution entitled "Developments in the field of informatization and telecommunications in the context of international information security".

Strategic stability also means enhancing peace and security on all continents, settling existing regional conflicts and preventing new ones and cutting off external support for them. Millions of people must be spared the death and suffering caused by local crises.

How can this goal be achieved? It is only through the joint efforts of all States collectively responsible for the world's destiny. Experience has shown that unilateral enforcement actions cannot guarantee a lasting and fair settlement of crisis situations.

The notions of sovereignty and the territorial integrity of States are still very much alive. Disregard for these principles and military intervention circumventing the Security Council, whatever humanitarian pretexts may be used, undermine the very foundations of the world order and pave the way for arbitrariness in international affairs.

The prevention and settlement of crises should become a key element of international security in the twenty-first century. When there is collective determination and goodwill, even the most complex and major problems lend themselves to a political resolution.

All of this calls for improvement of the peacekeeping potential of our Organization. People in "hotbeds" of the planet — from Africa and Lebanon to East Timor — rightly associate with the United Nations "Blue Helmets" their hopes for an end to bloody conflicts and for the beginning of complex reconciliation processes. They expect rapid and effective steps from us.

We hope that the Millennium Assembly will provide us with an opportunity to engage in a comprehensive analysis of the work of United Nations peacekeeping mechanisms and outline ways to increase their efficiency. Such is the objective of the report (A/55/305) prepared under the aegis of the Secretary-General by the Brahimi Panel. It is important to considerably enhance the United Nations capacity for the prompt deployment of peacekeeping operations. This can be done through the early completion of the system of standby arrangements. Peacekeeping units of the United Nations Secretariat need to be strengthened, with provision for professional planning, control and command of operations.

Russia consistently advocates the expansion of cooperation between the United Nations and regional structures in the field of peacekeeping. Chapter VIII of the United Nations Charter remains the basis for such interaction. Any regional or "coalition" operation should be conducted under conditions of transparency and of reporting to the United Nations Security Council, whereas operations with enforcement elements should be carried out only with the authorization of the Security Council.

The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) is a major regional partner of the United Nations in peacekeeping. In many respects, it was the close cooperation between the United Nations and the CIS that made it possible to successfully resolve the conflict in Tajikistan. Such interaction will undoubtedly intensify along with the development of the CIS anti-crisis potential. At the same time, for a stable peace to prevail in the conflict-affected regions in the CIS area the volume of international economic and humanitarian aid for their rehabilitation should be increased.

Russia attaches primary importance to the expansion of cooperation between the United Nations and regional and subregional mechanisms in Africa to provide for more effective crisis response on the continent. This is evidenced by the Russian participation in peacekeeping operations in a number of African countries.

The entire experience of United Nations peacekeeping activities in recent years clearly shows the priority of political and diplomatic methods of conflict settlement. It is precisely these methods that make it possible to minimize the suffering of the civilian population and to find ways to a stable peace.

Strategic stability means the security and tranquillity of civil society and of the individual. This task can be accomplished only through the combined efforts of the international community to counter contemporary threats and challenges. These include, inter alia, aggressive separatism and religious extremism, illicit arms trafficking and organized crime.

Such an abhorrent manifestation of extremism as international terrorism poses a direct threat to security and stability. Today, terrorists of every stripe sometimes act in a more organized fashion than does the world community confronting them. We expect that the United Nations will step up its mobilization of international capacities to counteract terrorism. Such cooperation must be based on the clear principles set forth in the Security Council resolution 1269 (1999): no support whatsoever, no safe havens for terrorists, the inevitability of punishment for every terrorist act. As to those who violate these principles the Security Council must be ready to take measures against them provided for in the United Nations Charter.

Russia intends to ratify the Convention for the Suppression of Terrorist Financing elaborated under United Nations auspices. There is an urgent need to complete work on the convention for the suppression of acts of nuclear terrorism, and that work on a comprehensive anti-terrorism convention should be stepped up.

Terrorism is often closely linked with drug trafficking and organized crime. We welcome the completion of the development of an international convention against organized crime. Russia intends to sign it in the nearest future. We also support the proposal on drafting an international convention on the fight against corruption.

Strategic stability means promoting human rights and freedoms everywhere. This area is an important component of the United Nations activities aimed at establishing a new world order based on international law.

Russia contributes significantly to strengthening the universal legal regime. Our country has signed the Statute of the International Criminal Court.

Speaking of pooling the efforts of States to resolve the twofold task of maintaining international security and ensuring human security, human rights and freedoms, we should constantly bear in mind that in the twentieth century the rule of the ideology of racial hatred cost mankind scores of millions of human lives. Unfortunately, today, 55 years after the great victory it is still premature to speak of total eradication of the bacillus of national superiority.

We cannot accept a situation in which people do not have the right to use their mother tongue, are deprived of their citizenship and jobs on ethnic grounds, when fighters against fascism are put behind bars while former fascists find favour with the authorities. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Council of Europe and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights should firmly respond to all such manifestations.

Strategic stability must be based on a solid material foundation. The twenty-first century will go down in history as the century of mankind's breakthrough to a qualitatively new level of development only if we manage to preserve peace and international security and at the same time impart necessary dynamism and depth to the process of economic and technological equalization between the enormous number of developing countries and the comparatively small group of leading countries. This goal cannot be achieved overnight. This will require — under the unifying and guiding hand of the United Nations — a mechanism for collective democratic management of the international monetary, trade and economic systems. They must become more rational and fair and be targeted against poverty and underdevelopment.

It is important to make the most of those opportunities which have been opened up by the new technological revolution in order to initiate the process of bridging the gap in the levels of development. Information and communications technologies whose potential for speeding up global development is only comparable to the invention of written language can serve as a driving force of that process. A chance has emerged to skip over several traditional stages of development through the introduction of global computer literacy and information technologies. Mankind, equipped with this powerful instrument, will obtain a real opportunity to begin creating conditions for a decent life and the all-around development of human beings everywhere on earth.

Strategic stability means the preservation of a clean and healthy environment for the present and future generations. The United Nations has done a great deal to mobilize international efforts in that important field. The "Rio+10" Forum, to be held in 2002, will provide an opportunity not only to sum up the results of those activities but also to outline a future-oriented follow-up programme.

Russia supports the expansion of international cooperation within the United Nations framework in the areas of biodiversity, climate, combating desertification, as well as of forest preservation.

The recent increase over the last few years in the number of natural and man-made disasters and the consequent growth of the scope of human and material losses have made disaster management one of the most formidable global challenges facing mankind. While intensifying the United Nations efforts to promote international cooperation in this field, special attention must be paid to the use of state-of-the-art specialized technologies for disaster management and to the search for innovative mechanisms for their use in the interests of the entire international community.

The United Nations — a unique universal forum in every respect, which has demonstrated in practice its central role in managing international affairs — should become a guarantor of such comprehensive strategic stability. Russia welcomes the consensus reached at the Millennium Summit on consolidating the United Nations as the axis of the present world order. The time has come for concrete collective measures to transform the Organization into a sort of operational headquarters for coordinating activities aimed at ensuring a new strategic stability based on the principles of multilateralism, equality and solidarity in resolving global problems.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize once again that the Russian Federation, for its part, is open to the closest interaction with all members of the international community in order to make strategic stability a cornerstone of the world order in the twenty-first century and the United Nations its reliable guarantor.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Shlomo Ben-Ami, Acting Minister for Foreign Affairs of Israel.

Mr. Ben-Ami (Israel): I stand here today as Israel's messenger of peace. The establishment of the State of Israel was the fulfilment of the dream of a people forced into exile 2,000 years ago. The destruction of the Second Temple and the dissolution of Jewish statehood were the result of our failure as a nation to assume the proper political course, to opt for accommodation with reality instead of engaging in messianic hallucinations. Our punishment was very severe indeed, but maybe it can serve as a lesson to those nations and leaders who today may be tragically led to believe that the dangerous inertia of romantic mythology and unrealistic dreams is preferable to the banality of a wise and prudent political course.

Most revolts are uprisings against a system. Zionism was a revolt against destiny. It is this expression of our re-encounter with the world of political realities that eventually led us to the restoration of Jewish statehood in 1948. Tragically, however, historical and geopolitical circumstances have put us in a prolonged, bitter conflict with the Palestinian people.

It was thanks to the leadership of Prime Minister Rabin and Chairman Arafat that, seven years ago, Palestinians and Israelis were put on a track leading to peace and reconciliation. We have been engaged in the past seven years, but more intensely in the last year, in a major effort, unprecedented in both scope and depth, to resolve this 100-year-old conflict. This negotiating process, and it alone, should be the foundation of a peace agreement.

At this point, I would like to address my colleagues from the Arab and Muslim world. I hope that my words will convince them of the Israeli Government's sincere intentions to achieve a comprehensive peace based on respect, dignity and fairness, which will end the Middle East conflict and best serve the vital interests of the entire region.

The Jewish people have no quarrel with Islam. On the contrary, we have the deepest respect for that great Islamic civilization under whose wings Jewish history — from Al-Andalus to Turkey, from Egypt to Iraq, from the Jewish quarters of Tangier to Aleppo in Syria — has known some of its finest hours and most glorious cultural achievements. But even at the height of the "Golden Age", in the midst of the delights and wonders of Muslim Spain, our people never abandoned their dream of and yearning for Jerusalem, as expressed in the words of the poet Yehuda Halevi more than 800 years ago:

> "My heart is in the East, and I am in the furthest reaches of the West. To thee my soul yearns from the depth of the West."

We are a small nation decimated by holocaust and dispersion, but our heritage is rich. It was from our eternal capital, Jerusalem — which, according to a Muslim source,

> "in the days of the people of Israel, was an area larger than Cairo and Baghdad" —

that the message of monotheism was projected to humanity. The Jewish holy sites and shrines in Jerusalem are the very heart of the Jewish faith, identity and history. For the past 2,000 years, Jews have turned towards Temple Mount in prayer three times a day.

> "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its cunning. Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth if I do not recall thee",

they pledged in joy and in sorrow.

For the past 30 years, Israel has consistently demonstrated its commitment to freedom of religion

and worship in Jerusalem. Heads of the various religious denominations in Jerusalem will attest to the fact that the city has never been so open to all believers. During the last month of Ramadan, a record number, unheard of in the annals of Islam in Jerusalem, of more than 400,000 Muslim worshippers attended Friday prayers at the Al-Aqsa Mosque.

I note this as an example of the deep respect which Israel has for Islam and its followers. Just as we do not question the sincerity of the sentiments of others towards their holy sites in Jerusalem, we expect that others will not question the Jewish people's deep, awe-inspired attachment to Jerusalem and its holy sites, from which we will never again be parted.

Politicians need not distort God's intentions for the sake of negotiations. How refreshing it is that a great number of Muslim scholars should attest to the fact that, as the Supreme Court Judge Mujir el-din al-Hanbali wrote in his *History of Jerusalem and Hebron*,

> "David reigned for 40 years and before he died he passed the monarchy on to his son Solomon and told him to build the *beit al-miqdas* — the Temple".

The expression *beit al-miqdas* — that is, the House of the Temple — became in many Muslim sources a synonym of the word "Jerusalem".

It is a travesty of historical truth to present the Palestinian refugee problem as the result of mass expulsion. There is no denying, however, that once the Jews — who for thousands of years waited with humility for their redemption — made their re-encounter with history as a sovereign nation, they had to assume the inherent immorality of war. The suffering of the civilian population will always be a burden on the conscience of any nation at war. The Arab-Israeli conflict has no monopoly on this maxim. Clearly, the Palestinian refugees were victims of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Israel, however, can assume neither political nor moral responsibility for this tragedy that was the direct result of the all-out onslaught against reborn Israel — an onslaught launched by the Arab armies in 1948. The Palestinian refugee problem was born as the land was bisected by the sword — not by design, Jewish or Arab. The problem was largely the inevitable by-product of Arab and Jewish fears and the protracted bitter fighting.

We believe that, once established, it is the Palestinian State that should provide for the vindication of the Palestinian claim for the right of return. The notion is preposterous that a nation should create a State only in order to gather its exiles in a neighbouring State. Israel, however, has expressed its willingness to actively participate in any international effort and fund aimed at providing the financial foundations for the resolution of the refugee problem. Out of humanitarian considerations, Israel may also accept a small and limited number of refugees within a scheme of family reunification.

Let there be no doubt. The peace process is not the objective, we need not sanctify the process. Peace, not the process, is the objective. Peace is not about more conventions, summits and resolutions; it is about the future of our children, and about the seemingly unattractive banalities of building the mechanisms of cohabitation.

To the Palestinians we say: we need to disentangle ourselves from this seemingly insoluble conundrum. We know that unless your and our wounds are healed, peace — not only the political peace but also that of the mind and the conscience — will not be complete. Yet, at the same time we realize that the total satisfaction of our respective dreams or presumed rights will lead us to perdition. Hence it is incumbent on us to devise realistic ways to heal without opening new wounds, to dignify our existence as free peoples without putting into jeopardy the collective existence of each other. Peace is not about twisting each other's arms; it is about defining a common interest. I believe that such an ideal compromise is not impossible to achieve, while banishing the sword from this land of God.

Peace has not materialized in full yet, but I believe that we are moving in the right direction. In the past year the Government of Prime Minister Ehud Barak has made bold, courageous and unprecedented moves towards peace. At Camp David we have contemplated ideas and explored concepts relating to the most sensitive and supposedly intractable issues. Our sense is that breakthrough is possible, just as failure may lead to breakdown. We have turned the sea that separated us into a river. But, do we have the courage and the determination to cross it?

I know I may not sound too objective by vouching for Prime Minister Barak. But, I have come

here with the power of conviction that no Prime Minister before him — and let no illusions be harboured, no Prime Minister after him — will touch as he has the outer limits of his options as an Israeli and a Jew.

I do not underestimate the dilemmas facing Chairman Arafat. He is the great leader of the Palestinian people, and I know that the decision is not easy for him either. But this is the destiny of leaders: to always be prophets without honour. They should not expect the applause of their constituencies, what really matters is the judgement of future generations. I call upon our Palestinian partners to realize that history has brought us to a moment of truth and decision from which we are not allowed to escape empty-handed without inflicting severe punishments on our own peoples.

Israel aspires to achieve a comprehensive peace in the region and help move it into the future. Twenty one years ago we signed a cornerstone peace treaty with Egypt, followed by a peace treaty with Jordan and an incipient but promising process of normalization with the Maghreb and Gulf States. Eighteen years of Israeli military presence in Lebanon have been terminated by the Barak Government, in close cooperation with the United Nations, and thanks especially to the efforts and dedication of Secretary-General Kofi Annan. We have also delved into the possibilities of reaching peace with Syria. We hope that talks with Syria will resume as soon as possible and that a fair and equitable agreement can be achieved.

Israel is determined to pursue peace and take the calculated risks attached to it. But Israel will not compromise — not now and not ever — on those security and national interests that we deem vital. While building our peace with the Palestinians we cannot ignore security concerns inherent in the fact that peace with the Palestinians is not our last peace. We still have a dispute pending with Syria, and we are still exposed to the most serious regional threats emanating from revolutionary powers in the area.

Peace requires the active involvement of the international community. The critical role played by the United States, and especially the relentless dedication and unequivocal commitment of President Bill Clinton, has been massive and constructive. Once again the United States has proven to be the indispensable nation. We have also seen the European Union rising to the task, and we commend the role of the French Presidency and that of other key European Governments. Peace needs the advice of the international community and it will need that support to cement peace once it is achieved.

We expect also to work closely with the Egyptian Government for the cause of regional peace. I believe that it is also important that Russia and the Arab world express their opinions that now is the time to make historical decisions. Time is an elusive and perishable commodity. We are all running out of it.

We are open to developing wide spaces of cooperation with our Palestinian neighbours and indeed with all the countries of the Middle East, with dignity and mutuality. But, we do not intend to impose our experience on anybody, nor is it our intention to assert our economic or technological presence amidst those of our neighbours who do not want it. The leaders and the elites throughout the Middle East do not need our advice to know what are the real challenges ahead of us all: modernizing the economy and combating disease, hunger, poverty and illiteracy. Indeed, small islands of excellence notwithstanding, the Middle East is in grave danger of being on the wrong side of the digital divide.

In his inaugural speech in 1961, the late President Kennedy invited his generation to join him in a struggle:

> "Now the trumpet summons us again — not as a call to bear arms, though arms we need; not as a call to battle, though embattled we are — but a call to bear the burden of a long twilight struggle, ... a struggle against the common enemies of man: tyranny, poverty, disease and war itself."

Nothing will make us happier than joining hands with our Arab neighbours with dignity and mutuality in this most noble of struggles.

The Middle East is not tranquil yet. It is still replete with armed conflicts, political hostilities and animosities. Israel believes that regional arrangements are crucial for arms control. A step-by-step approach, commensurate with progress towards comprehensive peace, is the right approach.

We are concerned by the expanding stockpiles of conventional weapons in the region, as well as by attempts made by Iran and Iraq to acquire and develop

non-conventional weapons, and by an increasing missile threat.

Israel attaches great importance to the eventual establishment of a zone free of weapons of mass destruction in the region. In order to reach that goal, direct negotiations between all States of the region must be held.

Last year saw a turnaround in Israel's relations with the United Nations. After years of anomaly, Israel was temporarily admitted to the Western European and Other Group (WEOG) in New York. We hope that Israel's admission to the Western Group in international organizations based outside New York will soon be secured.

The United Nations, and indeed most of its Member States, played a major role in demanding that Iran treat fairly the 13 Jews falsely accused, convicted and sentenced for ludicrous charges of espionage. It is in such instances that the international community has the opportunity to express its discontent and exert pressure on countries that break the norms of behaviour.

On the issue of the reform of the Security Council, is our opinion that the Security Council should faithfully reflect the present geopolitical picture, a picture that has changed beyond recognition since the last enlargement of the Council in 1965. We subscribe to the view that the right of veto — a safety net against the possible arbitrariness of the General Assembly — should remain in the hands of a limited number of States.

Allow me a final reflection on the Israeli-Palestinian dilemma.

The tragedy of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict stemmed from discrepant historical rhythms. The history of our modern national movement has been characterized by realistic responses to objective historical conditions. The Palestinians have consistently fought for the solutions of yesterday — those they had rejected a generation or two earlier. This persistent attempt to turn back the clock of history lies at the root of many of the misfortunes that have befallen the peoples of the region. Now it is time for all of us to overcome dire memories and look forward. Neither the physical nor the rhetorical war of images will bring us any closer to peace and reconciliation. No one has a monopoly on the mythology of suffering and atrocities. In this tragic dispute we have all committed acts of violence that we ought not to be proud of. To the Palestinians we say, we are excited by the prospects to overcome the troubled history of our relations in order to shape our dreams of peace. Let us then join hands in asking the world, which has been watching, perplexed at, and sometimes even fuelling our wars, to mobilize its resources for the benefit of our peoples. And, let us be full partners in this international effort to lay down the foundations of the Middle East of the future. The creative energies of our peoples should at long last be put to work in the service of peace, for as the wisest of kings, King Solomon, the builder of the Temple in Jerusalem, wrote thousands of years ago, there is:

> "A time for slaying and a time for healing ... a time for war and a time for peace". (*The Holy Bible, Ecclesiastes 3:3-8*)

The President: I call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Pakistan, His Excellency Mr. Abdul Sattar.

Mr. Sattar (Pakistan): Mr. President, it gives me great pleasure to join preceding speakers in offering you the Pakistan delegation's warm felicitations on your election. We pledge to you our wholehearted cooperation in your efforts dedicated to the success of this historic fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly.

I also take this opportunity to pay tribute to the leadership of the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan. His commitment and dynamism have reinforced the rightful role of the United Nations in addressing the challenges of our times.

The millennial transition is unique in the lives of those fortunate to witness it. We are fortunate, too, that we start this session in the glow of the Millennium Summit. We shall be inspired in our work by the ringing commitment of our leaders to values and principles fundamental to the maintenance of peace and security; b the resolve of our leaders to free peoples from the scourge of war, on the one hand, and to free humanity from dehumanizing poverty, on the other. Their determination to protect the environment, promote human rights, democracy and good governance, and to meet the special needs of Africa, will be our guide and mandate in our deliberations.

It will be our duty at this and future sessions of the General Assembly, to translate the Millennium

Declaration into action. This is no doubt a difficult challenge. But it is a challenge we must meet. Only thus can we contribute to the building of a future better than the past.

To all these ends — at once necessary as well as noble — our leaders pledged to spare no efforts to make the United Nations a more effective instrument of international cooperation.

What is needed, if I may borrow an apt phrase from the Secretary General's report, is a stronger commitment to action — action to achieve peace, and action to achieve development.

Each of our States can and must take action on both fronts. But individual efforts cannot achieve optimum results. All of us need to work with dedication and a strong sense of commitment in a cooperative and harmonious environment to promote the twin objectives for a better future.

The Millennium Declaration emphasizes the determination of world leaders to save peoples from the scourge of war. Also the Secretary General's report highlights peace and security as:

> "a central objective of the United Nations at the dawn of the twenty-first century, as it was when the Organization was founded over half a century ago". (*A/55/1, para. 29*)

The problem is how to prevent war and achieve peace. The solution is not difficult to find. What is needed is a stronger commitment to action. Given that commitment, crises and conflicts can be prevented and peace can be achieved. Peace not merely possible; it is realizable through a civilized approach to conflict resolution based on justice and international law and the principles of the Charter, the United Nations can ensure effective remedial action to maintain peace and security.

People watched with relief as the world community joined together to prevent genocide in Bosnia and Kosovo. With the commendable cooperation of the Government of Indonesia and the imaginative contribution of the Secretary-General, we approached the situation in East Timor in a similar way. The imaginative and diligent efforts of the Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General, Ambassador Jamsheed Marker, to promote the settlement in East Timor are a matter of pride for the people of Pakistan. These are all examples of how the United Nations and the international community can and should act to address conflicts by implementing its principles and decisions.

In the Middle East, too, the peace process has made steady, if agonizingly slow, progress. For the gains so far made, tribute is due to the idealistic efforts of the peacemakers and the realistic approach of the Palestinian and Israeli leaders. The residual issues are difficult and delicate, involving as they do principles of law and equity on the one hand, and deep emotions on the other. Yet we ardently hope that the peace process will succeed soon. Final settlement of the Palestinian question will be a crowning achievement and a momentous contribution to peace in the Middle East.

Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1977) are imbued with an irreplaceable international sanctity. Their implementation involves the prestige and credibility of the United Nations. An end to occupation and the reversion of holy Jerusalem to Palestinian sovereignty will ensure reconciliation and durable peace in the Middle East.

The Kashmir question, involving the life and future of the people of the State, has been the root cause of tensions in South Asia since 1947. Its settlement is an indispensable condition for peace and stability. The ten million people of that State will not be denied their right to freedom. They seek nothing more than the fulfilment of the commitments contained in the resolutions of the Security Council. Their right to decide their own future cannot lapse. The passage of 53 years has only compounded the tragedy of the Kashmiri people and prolonged their travail. The long delay has only heightened the terrible dangers inherent in the festering dispute.

According to the All Parties Freedom Conference, 72,000 Kashmiris have been killed since 1989. Thousands more have been tortured and maimed or have disappeared. The massive human rights violations in Kashmir, and the repression and brutality perpetrated on the Kashmiri people by occupation forces, are a grave crime of State terrorism.

In a desperate attempt to undermine and suppress the Kashmiri Freedom Movement, the perpetrators of repression and violence against the Kashmiri people have tried to portray the freedom struggle as terrorism. Such propaganda did not carry credibility in the past and it cannot do so now. It is familiar to all those who

have won freedom after protracted struggles against colonialism and foreign occupation.

Pakistan has consistently vowed to seek a peaceful settlement of the Kashmir dispute. Two years ago, the Security Council once again emphasized the need to resolve the dispute, which has been the source of tension and conflict in the region. The provisions of Article 33 of the Charter place an obligation on Member States to settle disputes through recourse to negotiation, inquiry, conciliation, mediation, arbitration or adjudication. Each and every one of these means is acceptable to Pakistan. Faced with the intransigent rejection of peaceful means, the Security Council has a responsibility to act. The Charter empowers the Security Council to do so. What is needed is a stronger commitment to action. In its absence, mere talk of crisis prevention and dispute resolution will lack credibility.

Afghanistan remains trapped in a terrible tragedy. Its protracted war of liberation in the 1980s left it devastated. The internecine war in the 1990s has inflicted further ravages. The economy of the country is in shambles. Drought in southern Afghanistan this past year has added to the misery of the people of this ancient land.

Tied to the Afghan people by bonds of geography, history and culture, the people of Pakistan view the tragedy in Afghanistan with a deep sense of sympathy. Despite economic stringency, we continue to provide shelter to 1.5 million Afghan refugees. The interruption of the food supply from, or via, Pakistan would further aggravate hardship and trigger a fresh influx. That is why Pakistan is opposed to sanctions that hurt people.

No people except the Afghan people themselves have suffered more from the conflict and instability in Afghanistan than the people of Pakistan. It is natural therefore that Pakistan should support all efforts for peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan. We were encouraged to note a similarity of approaches by the Foreign Ministers of the six contiguous countries, the Russian Federation and the United States at the "Six-plus-Two" group meeting convened on 15 September by the Secretary-General. Pooling our resources and influence, we should make more energetic efforts to persuade the Afghan parties and assist the Secretary-General of the United Nations in his efforts to promote a broad-based Government acceptable to the Afghan political parties and ethnic groups.

We support the Islamic Republic of Iran as it leads a parallel effort for peace in Afghanistan on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC). We also appreciate the efforts recently undertaken by Turkmenistan. In our view, all these efforts complement and reinforce each other.

In his report on the work of the Organization (A/55/1), the Secretary-General referred to the influx of war materiel to Afghanistan from outside. Pakistan urges not only a ceasefire but also a ban on the supply of military equipment to the Afghan parties and the establishment of a monitoring mechanism for its enforcement. We also remain cognizant of the imperative of respect for sovereignty. The Afghan people have a history of fierce resistance against outside interference. Engagement with the Afghan Government offers better hope for amelioration than attempts to drive it into a corner and isolate it. The United Nations has been providing humanitarian relief in Afghanistan. Programmes aimed at rehabilitation and reconstruction may help bring the country back into the international mainstream sooner. That is also the more compassionate way.

Pakistan, itself a victim of terrorism, condemns that evil in all its forms and manifestations, whether committed by individuals, groups or States. Our Government has ratified nine international conventions against terrorism and we join all international efforts to combat this menace.

Pakistan has historically supported all proposals and agreements aimed at the limitation, progressive reduction and eventual elimination of weapons of mass destruction. For over a quarter of a century we made efforts and initiated proposals to keep our area free of nuclear weapons. Also, Pakistan has been prepared to support universal and non-discriminatory measures and proposals. Pakistan voted in favour of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty in 1996 and intended to sign it along with all others, especially the designated States. The process of bringing that Treaty into force was derailed due to events not of our own making. Even then, Pakistan was not the first to conduct tests in 1998. Pakistan will not be the first to resume them. We still hope the Treaty can be brought into force. Pakistan will not obstruct the realization of that aim. Our Government continues efforts to build domestic consensus in favour of signing the Treaty.

Meanwhile, restraint and responsibility remain the guiding principles of our nuclear policy. Pakistan will not enter into any nuclear arms race. Our sole aim is to retain minimum credible deterrence. I wish to reaffirm in this Assembly that our nuclear capability is only meant to deter aggression against Pakistan; it poses no threat to any country.

We support efforts aimed at the prevention of the vertical or horizontal proliferation of nuclear weapons. During the past year we have further strengthened domestic regulations against export of nuclear equipment or materials. Our power reactors are under international safeguards.

Pakistan is prepared to cooperate in efforts to introduce restraints on the development, production and deployment of ballistic missiles. To be successful, however, such efforts must be non-discriminatory. Their aim must be stabilization of the situation.

Any use of nuclear weapons is inconceivable. However, the Charter obliges Members to refrain from the threat or the use of any force. The world community should, therefore, emphasize no-first-use of force, nuclear or conventional.

At the global level, Pakistan supports calls for the continued observance of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty. The militarization of outer space would be a disservice to hopes for the maintenance of existing restraint and stability.

Pakistan will participate in negotiations on the proposed fissile material cut-off treaty and make a positive contribution to evolving a fair and an equitable text that all countries can support.

In his address to the Millennium Summit, the Chief Executive of Pakistan, General Pervez Musharraf, stated:

> "The best assurance for the consolidation of global peace lies in the economic development and prosperity of all regions and all peoples. Economic progress in one region supports and complements prosperity in the other." (*A/55/PV.4*)

Development is not a zero-sum game. Accordingly, the Millennium Declaration commits world leaders to

> "making the right to development a reality for everyone" *(resolution 55/2, para. 11)* and freeing the entire human race from want.

Globalization raised hopes, as it offered opportunities for faster economic growth, higher living standards and accelerated benefits from the flow of knowledge and technology. But there have been disappointments. Experience has shown that the benefits of globalization have been uneven and that the number of people living in poverty has actually increased. Technological and information revolutions have accentuated global inequality, and a new digital divide has led to the marginalization of a large number of developing countries.

Global trade regimes benefit the rich, and the South has become poorer. Competition, standards, a variety of non-tariff barriers, increasingly complex trading practices, protectionism in selected sectors such as agriculture, and restrictions on technology transfers all militate against the interests of the developing countries. They find it hard to secure adequate returns for their products or to attract investment to improve their competitiveness. As a result, economic disparities are widening. This belies the promise of free markets to ensure the well-being of all.

The failure of the World Trade Organization meeting in Seattle last November and dissenting voices heard in Washington last April make it clear that the international economic system needs to be fixed. Concerted global action is required for sustained development to benefit and protect weaker economies. The industrialized countries have a special responsibility to adopt bold initiatives. Professions of a desire for the eradication of poverty must first lead to the establishment of an international economic policy framework responsive to the needs of the developing countries.

One important area is the debt issue. In one of the interactive dialogues the Secretary-General proposed that the United Nations could mediate between creditors and debtors to address the debt problem. We welcome this proposal. Our Chief Executive, speaking at the same meeting, suggested that developing indebted countries should be allowed to utilize resources allocated to debt servicing for the development of the social sector, especially education and health care. Substantive debt relief through innovative approaches will go a long way to help developing countries ensure global harmony and regenerate a new economic partnership between the North and the South.

A holistic approach to deal with problems of development and poverty eradication is necessary. While we welcome the Secretary-General's initiative to bridge the digital divide, the emphasis must remain on addressing mass literacy, capacity-building, infrastructure and basic health facilities. Similarly, multilateral trade regimes should be development-oriented. Environmental concerns about the prudent use of natural resources must be pursued simultaneously with emphasis on sustained economic growth in the South.

The High-level International Intergovernmental Event on Financing for Development, which will be held next year, must involve the world's finance, trade and development organizations in discussing the issues comprehensively. The conference should promote good governance at the international level. It must address how we can manage globalization appropriately so that its benefits reach everyone, ensuring universal prosperity.

The upsurge of democracy in the past decade has been a good omen for the start of the new millennium. This salutary trend can only be sustained through equitable economic development. Unless the developing nations are able to have a fair share in rising levels of global prosperity, the advocacy of democratic values and human and social standards will remain hollow.

In Pakistan we are addressing the challenges of both economic revival and institutional reforms that emphasize accountability, good governance and the devolution of power to grass-roots levels political institutions. In this endeavour, the Government is banking on the support and enthusiasm of our people. We believe that democracy is, first and foremost, empowerment of the people, based on strong institutions.

The world community is well aware of the ravages inflicted on fragile economies of developing countries and their poor people as a result of corruption and the transfer of illegal funds to safe havens abroad. They are often the worst victims of such malpractice due to socio-economic forces within and banking practices outside their countries.

The welfare of humanity in developing countries demands international cooperation for the prevention of corruption. Such cooperation was urged in resolutions 53/176 of 15 December 1998 and 54/205 of 22 December 1999. The South Summit, held in Havana in April 2000, also requested remedial action.

Transfers of illicit funds from developing countries will not make the rich countries much richer, but they will make the poor countries poorer. It is a paradox that some rich countries have such lax laws that they provide safe havens and encourage private banks to launder illicit funds looted by corrupt persons from poor countries by facilitating the establishment of secret accounts. That is tantamount to the encouragement of plunder, indeed, of financial terrorism.

The nexus between corruption and the failure of democracy was recognized also in the Final Declaration issued by the meeting of the Community of Democracies in Warsaw, held from 25 to 27 June 2000. It emphasized the need to combat corruption, which corrodes democracy. We need, therefore, to take effective action. We propose that the General Assembly should proclaim a policy of zero tolerance of all types of corruption and urge a ban on the laundering of illicit funds.

The United Nations has emerged as the only forum with the universal recognition and authority to address the entire spectrum of issues relating to human aspirations for peace, justice and development. To meet these growing expectations, this world body must be strengthened. Its role must be reinforced in order to ensure a better future for the world.

We support the call for enhancing the capacity of the United Nations in the areas of conflict prevention and peacekeeping. In this regard, we commend Mr. Brahimi and members of the high-level Panel for their extensive report. As an important participant in United Nations peace-keeping operations, we in Pakistan look forward to discussions on the useful ideas and concepts that have been presented in the report to enable the United Nations to respond more effectively to existing and incipient conflicts and threats to international peace and security.

No other aspect of reform of the United Nations merits as close attention as the need to make the Security Council more democratic, transparent and accountable. Periodic elections of a larger number of members will make the Security Council not only more representative but also more responsive to the aspirations of the world community. That will enhance the capacity of this vital organ to contribute to the

maintenance of international peace and security and to the realization of the purposes of the Organization. That objective will not be achieved by the creation of new centres of privilege which detract from the cardinal principle of the sovereign equality of States. For the same reason, the decision-making process needs to be made more democratic.

For the Security Council to command universal respect, its reform should have the general agreement of the membership. Nothing should be done in haste or in a manner that divides the membership or impairs the authority and prestige of the Council.

In this increasingly interactive world, we share with other nations the desire for a peaceful environment and mutually beneficial cooperation, and we see a pivotal role for the United Nations. The universality of the United Nations gives it a stature and legitimacy that is unprecedented in history. The Organization should begin the twenty-first century by demonstrating a clear commitment to addressing and resolving the key development and security challenges facing our peoples. It must be enabled to apply its immutable principles and its decisions consistently and forcefully to ensure durable peace, sustained economic progress and a better future for all humanity.

The President: I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. James Victor Gbeho, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ghana.

Mr. Gbeho (Ghana): On behalf of my delegation, Sir, I wish to congratulate you sincerely on your election as President of the fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly. This session is indeed historic, coming as it does in the wake of a Millennium Summit that witnessed the presence of the largest-ever gathering of political leaders of the international community. I also wish to commend the other members of the Bureau on their election.

May I also take this opportunity to pay a richly deserved tribute to your predecessor, Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab, Foreign Minister of Namibia, whose deep sense of duty and commitment to social justice helped shape the United Nations agenda for the new century. Indeed, the General Assembly gave impetus to such an agenda when, in December 1998, it decided to hold the Millennium events, believing strongly that the turn of the century was a unique and symbolically compelling moment to articulate and affirm an animating vision for the United Nations in the new era.

Barely a fortnight ago, world leaders met here in New York, following that commitment, to address the challenges of the new century, reaffirm their commitment to the Charter of the United Nations and to demonstrate political will for the new process. The message that emerged from the statements made by the heads of State or Government at the Millennium Summit was the reaffirmation of the unique role of the United Nations in offering the best, and only, universal framework for confronting the challenges of the millennium.

It recognized a United Nations capable of promoting a new development agenda that is people-oriented and which also guarantees greater participation of stakeholders, particularly women, the youth, the private sector and civil society at large; a United Nations that has been revitalized to play a more meaningful role in helping developing countries meet the challenges of poverty reduction, political pluralism and the ongoing process of globalization; a United Nations that boldly plays its role as an Organization working for the good of all, with the confidence of the world's people.

The conjunction of the fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly and the beginning of a new millennium provides a symbolic departure point for the international community to seek to do better in all areas of its endeavour. Today, there is no greater challenge facing our world and no greater issue defining this millennium than the debilitating inhumanity of poverty, its heavy hand on wealth creation, its fast spread across the world, the deadly effect of economic insecurity on peace and security and its impact on the environment. It is thus perplexing that under the effect of globalization, deprivation and inequality are accelerating globally with as much speed as innovation, technological progress and integration, although in different directions. Our collective ingenuity, that of both developed and developing, is called upon to produce answers that will bring us closer than ever before to the purposes of the Charter.

We have encountered disappointments as the international community has striven for peace, security, development and respect for human rights. We have also sought ways of dealing with the impact of globalization on international trade and investment. We should not resign ourselves to these reversals, nor should we accept living with them. To do so would defeat the objective of development. The way forward

is not only to revitalize the United Nations to enable it to strive more boldly for a more equitable global society, but also to work together to ensure that equity, fairness and solidarity characterize international relations.

On the important question of maintaining international peace and security, the role of the United Nations has been, without doubt, that of facilitating conditions under which countries and peoples may live together securely and harmoniously in order to give free rein to their creative talents. One important means of achieving this objective in the midst of violent conflicts that keep erupting has been to undertake peacekeeping all over the world. Ghana has been and will continue to be a major contributor to this effort, as conflicts in Africa especially pose a major challenge to the United Nations efforts to bring about global peace and prosperity.

The situations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Sierra Leone, to name only two examples, amply demonstrate the complexities of the challenges which the United Nations must show it can handle. In the West African subregion, for example, we must all cooperate in imposing a ban on the purchase of small arms and especially on the purchase of diamonds that are not controlled by the Certificate of Origin regime from countries in conflict. Unless the international community helps by implementing this aspect of Security Council resolutions, international peace and security will continue to be prejudiced by the greed and ambition of individuals.

Enhancing Africa's peacekeeping capacity to cope with challenging missions, through training, logistics and financial support, as well as a stronger partnership between the United Nations and the Organization of African Unity (OAU) Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution, is a crucial goal if we are to return the continent to peace and security. That is one of the reasons why Ghana attaches importance to regional and subregional peacekeeping initiatives. However, such initiatives should not become an excuse for the United Nations or the Security Council to shirk their primary responsibility for the maintenance of peace and security in Africa.

Disarmament lies at the heart of the United Nations efforts to ensure and sustain international peace and security, conditions necessary for all productive human activity. The nuclear threat of the cold-war era still looms large over all of us and will continue to do so until the nuclear Powers and militarily significant countries disarm. It is therefore reassuring that, despite the gloom that has beclouded the United Nations disarmament machinery over past years, positive results were achieved at the Sixth Review Conference of the State Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT).

The United Nations must capitalize on this momentum and continue its search for new ways and means to achieve nuclear disarmament and arms non-proliferation. It must also embark on confidence-building measures in order to enhance the process. In this regard, the Disarmament Commission and other relevant machinery on disarmament established by the General Assembly should be given every opportunity to fulfil their mandates through the demonstration by Member States of commitment, flexibility and the necessary political will.

Ghana would therefore use this opportunity to reiterate its support for the proposal by the Secretary-General of convening a major international conference on the nuclear threat. We will also play an active part in the preparatory process leading to the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects, to be held in 2001.

Ghana believes that the efforts of the United Nations to promote and maintain international peace and security should rest on a firm international legal framework, hence the need to maintain support for the useful work being done by the International Law Commission and related institutions in the United Nations system. We believe that the tremendous progress made in the establishment of legal frameworks for the pursuit of crimes against humanity, for example, must continue if our societies are to be maintained.

In the particular case of Africa, support for the International Criminal Court is not only desirable; it is a must, since censure by the international community is now very necessary in dissuading warlords and rebels from committing the heinous crimes that we continue to witness in countries such as Sierra Leone, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Ghana recommends, therefore, that international law should

ensure that the perpetrators of such crimes are punished and that they do not enjoy amnesty from any country.

The spirit of compromise which led to the overwhelming endorsement of the Rome Treaty establishing the International Criminal Court, must be kept alive to achieve our objectives in this field.

The situation in the Middle East continues to engage the serious attention of us all. Ghana acknowledges the current propitious climate in the Middle East as a result of the revival of contacts between Israel and the Palestinian Authority at the highest levels. The withdrawal of Israeli Defence Forces from Southern Lebanon has given these talks a sense of optimism, and so have the meetings between Chairman Arafat and Mr. Ehud Barak. While we commend President Clinton's efforts, the two leaders of the Middle East are urged to show flexibility and stay the course, as the obstacles to peace cannot be removed without compromise, painful sacrifices, diplomacy and a strong desire for durable peace. Both sides should remember that this is perhaps the finest hour for reaching agreement. The negative forces in Israel, especially, are regrouping, while the younger generation in Palestine are growing more and more impatient. No sacrifice should therefore be too great for success.

Ms. Brizuela de Ávila (El Salvador), Vice-President, took the Chair.

In this new era we must have the boldness to end attitudes and situations that are no longer helpful to the process of globalization. In spite of the regular acknowledgement by world leaders and other influential policy makers of the need for poverty alleviation, those in a position to do so have failed to offer credible arrangements for debt relief, market access and financing for development which would go a long way in enabling developing countries to build viable socio-economic systems capable of overcoming the fragmentation and marginalization being suffered as a result of globalization. On the contrary, they are using their pre-eminent political and economic positions to try to control and manipulate developing countries, especially countries whose Governments they do not support.

It seems to me that the world community is yet to translate the traditional parochial affirmation of the need for equity, fairness and solidarity for national development into concrete international actions. Furthermore, the United Nations will be able to teach lessons of equality and justice to its members only when it practises those norms itself.

At the end of the cold war the peoples of the world heard a lot about the peace dividend. Only a decade after this new concept was trumpeted from the rooftops, it has turned out to be non-existent. But that concept can be real if the tenor of our negotiations reflects an awareness of our common humanity and its highest values rather than the diplomatic stock-in-trade of an era shaped by competitive warfare and an unequal advantage of the rich and powerful over the poor and militarily insignificant countries. International cooperation for development must replace inequity and war.

Transforming the context of international cooperation for development depends as much on the level of commitment of individuals and groups in our respective countries as it does on what we do as political leaders and policy makers. In this connection, reinforcing and enhancing the network of linkages between the United Nations and civil society is a fundamental necessity. Unless our actions reflect this strategic understanding of the nature of decision-making in the world today, we are unlikely to benefit from the mistakes of our past efforts.

We accordingly urge the Secretary-General to examine ways of ensuring common, acceptable standards for accountability and transparency, even in the operations of non-governmental organizations with respect to their participation in the United Nations. In addition, a greater effort should be made to build the capacity of non-governmental organizations in developing countries so that non-governmental organization participation in the United Nations could reflect the diversity of interests across the world.

Ghana welcomes the contribution of non-governmental organizations to the work of the United Nations and individual countries, but must at the same time caution against replacing the genuine and democratic voice of a people with those of externally controlled non-governmental organizations and the private sector. Non-governmental organizations and the private sector are vital agents of change in developing countries, but they should not replace the voice of a people, if democracy is to retain credibility.

In an age of globalization and of our increasingly knowledge-based society, we feel that the United

Nations has a major responsibility to support the development efforts of the developing countries, and that the international community should provide the necessary resources for it to do so. We therefore call once again on all Member States to fulfil their financial obligations under the Charter in full and on time.

The challenges facing the international community, such as the growing income and technology gaps between the North and the South, poverty and deprivation, point to the need for stronger cooperation between the developed and developing countries. A concerted effort will be required to promote a systematic dialogue between the two groups to find solutions to these problems.

It must be the vocation — indeed, the commitment — of the North-South partnership to ensure that in the new millennium governance, nationally and globally, rests on the recognition that the wealth of some must not lead to the impoverishment of others, and that every person on this earth must have access to certain basic social services, such as health care, education, food and safe water, no matter which corner of the earth he or she inhabits. Thus the rich countries have an indispensable role to play by further opening their markets, by providing larger and faster debt relief and by giving more and better focused development assistance, which would enable poorer countries to sustain a meaningful level of development.

It is only fitting that as a developing economy, Ghana identifies itself with the cause of the least developed countries, most of which are in Africa. In this connection, we fully subscribe to the preparatory work for the Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries. We expect consensus to be reached on the accessibility of products of least developed countries to the developed markets.

Our comments on this occasion would be incomplete without touching upon the crucial question of the empowerment of women and the attainment of gender balance. We also wish to express concern about the persistence of discrimination against women in most parts of the world in spite of the progress achieved since the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in 1995. The challenges to the achievement of gender balance can be eliminated through a renewed commitment to the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. We therefore call on all countries which have not yet ratified the Convention to take steps to do so, and urge prompt implementation of the provisions of the Convention. We also urge those who have entered reservations incompatible with the purpose of the Convention to reconsider their stance, in the interest of advancing the cause of women.

The promotion and protection of the rights of children are of equal concern to my delegation. They are the compelling reasons for our co-hosting jointly with the Government of Canada a workshop on children in armed conflicts. It is our expectation that Member States will endeavour to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child before the General Assembly's special session in 2001 that will review the implementation of the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children and of the Plan of Action. It is also our hope that the positive outcome of the just ended International Conference on War-affected Children, held in Winnipeg, Canada, will be fully implemented to ensure the worldwide protection of children during conflicts.

I now turn to the HIV/AIDS pandemic, whose impact has been greatest in sub-Saharan Africa, where it is estimated to have affected the modest gains in social development. Statistics released during the XIII International AIDS Conference in South Africa in July this year showed that almost a third of all people with HIV/AIDS are between the ages of 15 and 24 years. Every minute six people under the age of 25 catch HIV, with girls more than 50 per cent more likely to contract the virus than boys. Based on this data, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has emphasized that to defeat the disease, Governments must commit themselves to "the largest mobilization of resources in their history" and organize themselves as if they were fighting "a full-blown war of liberation", with young people in the forefront.

This staggering situation must prick the conscience of the entire international community into rendering full support for efforts to control and minimize the spread of the disease. Ghana supports the Secretary-General's proposal for the adoption of 2005 and 2010 respectively as deadlines by which to reduce the rate of infection of young persons through the assurance by the developed partners and their pharmaceutical industries of the easy availability of inexpensive vaccines. To reach that goal, we must also invest in education, publicity, open discussions and

moral counselling of our youth, in particular. They must understand that it is indeed possible to avoid the disease by exercising care, since this fatal disease is transmitted in a very limited number of ways. We appeal to our developed partners for their full cooperation.

Finally, there is no doubt that the United Nations remains the only instrument for confronting the challenges of this millennium. However, it can surmount these challenges only by sustaining the good will and credibility it enjoys among Member States and this can be achieved only by expediting the democratization of the Organization. May the new vision which our leaders have charted for the Organization in this new century spur us all to concrete action to free our peoples, whose faith and trust reside in us, from fear, want and exclusion.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Aleksandar Dimitrov, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

Mr. Dimitrov (the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia): At the outset, I would like to congratulate Mr. Holkeri on his election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-fifth session. At the same time, I would like to express our appreciation to the President of the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session, Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab, for the results achieved during his presidency.

On this occasion, I would also like to express our gratitude to Secretary-General Kofi Annan for his efficient and relevant leadership of the Organization. The Republic of Macedonia will continue actively to contribute to the realization of the goals of the United Nations.

I also welcome the admission of Tuvalu to the United Nations, wishing it success in its contribution to United Nations activities and expressing our wish to establish diplomatic relations. At the same time, the Republic of Macedonia expresses its readiness and calls for the acceleration of the process of establishing diplomatic relations with all other States Members of the United Nations with which we have not yet done so.

In the region where the Republic of Macedonia is located, the situation has to some extent improved after the huge humanitarian crisis that took place in Kosovo. The heavy consequences of the crisis, which posed a serious threat to the stability and security of the Balkans and more widely in Europe, have not been fully overcome.

The Republic of Macedonia has and will have in the future a vital role to play for peace and stability in South-East Europe and beyond. The risks confronting the Republic of Macedonia were enormous. The Macedonian Government and our citizens have done everything within their capacity to respond to the problems. However, as was the case in the previous crises that occurred in the Balkans and during the Kosovo conflict last year as well, as one of the countries that most directly felt and bore the brunt of the damage, the Republic of Macedonia has shown and confirmed its long-term commitment to acting as a factor for peace and stability in the region. The Government, even in such conditions, persisted in its policy to preserve the stability of the Macedonian State and at the same time to reaffirm its capability to respond to all challenges and risks confronting it, in particular in the economic and social fields.

One of the main priorities of the foreign policy of the Republic of Macedonia is to further improve good-neighbourly relations with all its neighbours. This commitment has been confirmed through a number of our initiatives, resulting in more advanced and developed relations in bilateral cooperation and intensified cooperation within the framework of a number of regional initiatives. My country is aware that stability and prosperity, in the medium and long terms, can be ensured only if stability is spread throughout South-East Europe, with intensive mutual communications and good-neighbourly cooperation among all States of the region.

My country has managed, with almost all its neighbours — Greece, Albania and Bulgaria, but not the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, with which we continue to negotiate the demarcation of our common border — to have outstanding relations and to develop cooperation in many areas of common interest. We have significantly improved relations with our southern neighbour, Greece. We continue to hold talks on our differences over the name of my country, under the auspices of the Secretary-General, expressing our will and interest in resolving this issue as soon as possible, taking into account the reality and dignity of the country and all its citizens.

Despite the huge expectations and initial support, the project that is most expected to contribute to the lasting stabilization of the region — the Stability Pact — has not managed to ensure the implementation of a large number of ideas and plans that have been submitted and accepted. The Pact, a significant example of the joint engagement and functioning of a large number of international organizations and States, is intended to hasten the revitalization of the countries of South-East Europe and their integration into European structures. I appeal to all participants engaged in this process, especially the donors and the wider international community, to make the utmost efforts to speed its urgent and timely implementation through the accelerated and full realization of these projects. This will provide for the economic prosperity of the countries of South-East Europe and strengthen democratic processes, respect for human rights and stability in the region. The implementation of the Pact constitutes a natural upgrading of our activities within the context of regional initiatives to promote good-neighbourly relations and the possibility of the realization of the foreign policy priorities of my country: its full integration into the European and Euro-Atlantic structures.

In addition to its foreign policy activities, the Government of the Republic of Macedonia is fully committed to carrying out fundamental reforms based on European standards — political, economic and democratic — with maximum respect for human rights, including minority rights. The Government of my country is continuously working on the improvement of inter-ethnic relations. A law on higher education was recently adopted that paves the way for private higher education in minority languages. Therefore, as a result of our commitment, concrete steps and achievements, by the end of this year my country will be the first in the region to conclude the Stabilization and Association Agreement with the European Union.

The efforts of the international community to stabilize the region, to which the Republic of Macedonia has contributed widely, are beginning to show results. Despite the limitations, it should be taken into consideration that the seriousness and complexity of the situation in Kosovo, and in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia as a whole, mean that the consequences of this situation cannot be alleviated with the speed desired by all of us, especially by the countries of the region.

In regard to the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, our view is that its democratization is one of the key factors for the comprehensive stabilization of the situation in the region. Our joint efforts should be directed at support for the democratic forces in that country and at joint actions to start the democratic process, followed by the provision of opportunities for economic prosperity. It is important to reassess the overall effects of the sanctions, which should not be directed at the citizens. We hope that the upcoming elections in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia will be fair and democratic, in accordance with European and Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe standards, and be a step towards that country's democratization.

Regarding the situation in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, I would like, in my capacity as Chairman of the South-East European Cooperation Process, to inform the Assembly about the joint declaration recently adopted by the Foreign Ministers of the participating States in New York. In the declaration we, the Foreign Ministers, expressed our concern about the latest developments in the situation in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia as regards the upcoming presidential and parliamentary elections, and confirmed our support for the democratic forces in that country and for its efforts to start the democratic process.

All of this might contribute to the integration of that country into the international community and to its participation in the work of international organizations, following the path that all the other successor States of the former Yugoslavia have taken. Furthermore, the resolution of the succession issue of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia on the basis of the equality of all successors — as acknowledged by the decisions of the European Union/United Nations International Conference on the Former Yugoslavia, as well as by the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions — is a prerequisite for stability and peace in the region.

Concerning the issue of succession, I would like to point out that during the Millennium Summit and Millennium Assembly, the four successor States have once again reaffirmed their joint position and proposed to work more intensively to settle this issue.

Furthermore, I would like to express our support for the stability and the reform processes undertaken in Montenegro and for the efforts of the democratically

elected Government there to continue pursuing economic and democratic development. We also support that Government's greater involvement in the work of international bodies and organizations and in other regional cooperation processes.

The consistent position of my country, which was stated well before the outbreak of the Kosovo crisis and adoption of the Security Council resolution 1244 (1999), was to support a peaceful and political solution to the Kosovo crisis through substantial autonomy in the framework of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, respect for the human rights of all living in Kosovo, respect for the inviolability of the existing borders and, finally, the economic reconstruction and stabilization of Kosovo and of the region.

We support the activities of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo and the Kosovo Force (KFOR). We are convinced of the need to build democratic institutions and a multi-ethnic society in Kosovo, and to find a model of civil society that does away with any propensity to create ethnically cleansed territories. The local elections in Kosovo are of paramount importance for its future.

The Republic of Macedonia is concerned about the reported violence and the increased number of inter-ethnic incidents and tensions in Kosovo. We consider that KFOR should strengthen its border control activities, with the aim of preventing violence from spilling over into the neighbouring countries, including my country. I am stressing this because there have been several serious incidents at the border of the Republic of Macedonia.

In the hope that the developments in Kosovo will be the last serious challenge in the Balkans, we will have to defend together more successfully democratic principles and values and develop long-term preventive strategies. Regional stability can be provided only by economic prosperity, democracy and respect for human rights and the rights of national minorities, as well as through intensive regional and bilateral cooperation. However, the most serious guarantee for the security of the region and its transformation into an area of democracy, development, stability and cooperation remains the early integration and full-fledged membership of the countries from the region in the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

This year's Millennium Assembly presents a genuine opportunity to analyse the work of our Organization and to evaluate its efficiency in resolving issues of international interest. We all hope that the directions for future development will also be underscored, with the aim of further promoting the achieved results and practices.

One of the main characteristics of the modern world is that now more than ever there is a great deal of interdependence. This represents a new challenge, and at the same time is a new feature of international relations. Moreover, when everybody is talking about the enormous significance of the ever more important multilateral character of the international scene and about globalization, the question of the equal participation of all the world's actors is being raised. That is, at issue is the official representation of the voices of all peoples. In this regard, I would like to express our support for the efforts of the Republic of China on Taiwan to become integrated into the international community, taking into consideration the interests of that country and also its significant contribution to international cooperation and the solidarity it has shown. It is in the interest of our Organization that the 23 million people of the Republic of China participate in its activities.

The negative effects of crises, threats to peace, security and economic development, and the pollution of the environment are felt globally. In accordance with the new situation in international relations, needs and visions, an obvious demand exists to strengthen the role of the United Nations. Our Organization can successfully carry out its activities only if the Member States fully contribute to their realization.

In order to allow the Organization to be able to play a successful role in the twenty-first century, it is necessary to adequately reform it. We welcome the efforts made by the Secretary-General thus far to this effect, and at the same time we would like to urge him and the Member States to continue. Furthermore, I would like to underline that the reform of the United Nations will be successful only if strengthening the role of the General Assembly follows the reform of the Security Council. In our view, it is necessary to increase the number of permanent and non-permanent members of the Security Council on the basis of the new reality in international relations. These new members should come from both the developing and developed countries.

What needs to be done so that the United Nations can adequately respond to the challenges of this century? The Millennium Summit offered part of the answer. The adopted Millennium Summit Declaration creates obligations for all Member States in their future endeavours. We share the opinion that, although the Declaration is a political document, it is first of all an action plan of our Organization for the period to come. Stressing the importance of the adopted document, I would like to urge the General Assembly to begin implementing it. In these efforts, the Republic of Macedonia will actively contribute.

The Republic of Macedonia will also continue to contribute to the strengthening of international peace and security. I emphasize that part of our contribution to the realization of the issues will be elaborated under the three agenda items as a follow-up to the resolutions submitted by the Republic of Macedonia.

The maintenance of international peace and security worldwide will continue to be the priority of our Organization in the twenty-first century. As the Secretary-General stated in his report, the world, and our Organization in particular, will be faced with the need to be fully involved in conflict prevention, conflict resolution and the development of the affected States. Therefore, prevention should become one of the primary instruments of our Organization. In regard to our contribution to prevention activities and policy, I would like to inform the Assembly that in the Republic of Macedonia an international centre for conflict prevention and resolution is being established.

Of great importance to stability and security, in our view, is the control of small arms and light weapons, which pose a large threat to peace in many regions of the world. In that connection, the United Nations, in cooperation with other regional organizations, such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), can have a serious impact on preventing the proliferation of small arms and light weapons.

We urge the international community to take strong measures in its efforts to stop arms trafficking, especially of small arms and light weapons. In that respect, we hope that that the international conference on this issue, which will take place next year, will contribute to more efficient actions.

Among the reasons for the eruption of a large number of local conflicts worldwide are economic and social factors. Globalization, apart from its positive effects, has a number of negative implications for the small and least developed economies. Financial resources for development are necessary; realistically, the United Nations is not able to provide them. We support the appeal for the necessary voluntary contributions from Member States, but also the idea of involving other participants, such as international financial institutions, the private sector and other bodies. In this respect, we welcome next year's international Conference on Financing for Development. I underline that writing off the debts, or part of them, of countries affected by objective external influences would have a very positive impact. It would also help to diminish global poverty and unemployment and aid the overall economic development of the indebted countries.

The General Assembly is the proper place for evaluating achievements in the promotion and protection of human rights and freedoms. There has been an impressive development of international human rights law in the last 50 years. Today we can proudly state that the United Nations, with the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other instruments, succeeded in affirming the international consensus — that human dignity is to be the basic standard and the main goal for all people and nations.

Last year we marked the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and next year there will be a world summit on this issue. I take this opportunity to announce the intention of the Republic of Macedonia to sign in the very near future the two Optional Protocols to the Convention, the first on the involvement of children in armed conflict and the second on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

Before I conclude, I would like to single out a few issues to which my Government attaches crucial importance: first the situation in Africa, both political and economic; secondly, the Middle East peace process; thirdly, the financial situation of our Organization — all Member States should fulfil their obligations; and, finally peacekeeping operations, which contribute to the affirmation of our Organization on a global scale. This is the right moment for their

restructuring and strengthening on the basis of the report (A/55/305) prepared by the Brahimi Panel.

Many challenges await us in the twenty-first century. Our obligation is to make the world a better and happier place to live in. In the realization of that aim, the United Nations has a significant place and role. The significance and existence of our universal Organization lies in its skilfulness in adapting to real situations and future challenges.

We expect this year's Millennium Assembly to contribute to the realization of this aim. I assure the Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia's contribution to its successful fulfilment.

The Acting President: *(spoke in Spanish)* Before calling on the next speaker, the Foreign Minister of Australia, I draw the attention of Member States to the appeal in connection with the observance of the Olympic Truce during the games of the XXVII Olympiad, held in Sydney, Australia, from 15 September to 1 October. The appeal was made on 5 September, at the closing of the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly, by the President of the Assembly for that session, Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab.

I now call on His Excellency The Honourable Alexander Downer, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Australia.

Mr. Downer (Australia): I join my colleagues in congratulating the President on his election as President of the General Assembly for its fifty-fifth session and you, Madam Vice-President, on your election to your position.

I am also delighted to welcome Tuvalu as the 189th Member of the United Nations. Australia has long-standing and very friendly relations with Tuvalu, and we have worked closely together as members of the South Pacific Forum and the Commonwealth. We are pleased that Tuvalu is now a Member of the United Nations, and look forward to new opportunities to work together for the United Nations common goals of peace and development.

We meet today just after the largest number of heads of State and Government in history gathered for the Millennium Summit. While the Summit touched on the multitude of problems facing the world at the start of a new century, a theme common to many speeches was the need for the United Nations to reform so as to meet the challenges of the era: the challenges of securing peace, of fighting poverty and of empowering and liberating oppressed peoples.

I want to respond to those calls for reform in my remarks to the Assembly today.

Without continuing commitment to reform, the United Nations — like any organization — cannot expect to keep up with rapid change in the contemporary international environment. In the absence of change and adaptation, the Organization will wither as the nations of the world bypass it in favour of institutions and mechanisms that are more relevant to their needs.

Australians believe that the most fundamental task of the Organization — and the very reason for its creation at the end of the Second World War — is the maintenance of international peace and security. In recent years we have seen the United Nations perform at both ends of the spectrum of relevance and effectiveness: at a low point in addressing problems in Kosovo and Rwanda, and at a high point in the resolution of the conflict in East Timor.

I am a strong advocate of an active role for the United Nations in the restoration and preservation of international peace and security, especially in situations where there may be imminent danger of humanitarian catastrophe. Appropriate action by the United Nations in these circumstances does more than perhaps anything else to demonstrate the continuing relevance of the Organization to an often sceptical international public.

Today I want to focus attention on four aspects of reform within the United Nations system: reform of the Security Council; electoral group reconfiguration; reform of peacekeeping; and reform of the human rights treaty committee system. It is our view that progress in each of these areas must be achieved to enable the United Nations to deliver results and ensure its relevance and effectiveness.

Reform and expansion of the Security Council is driven by two fundamental, interrelated imperatives: the need to restore the representative nature of the Council by reconfiguring its composition to reflect the size and diversity of contemporary United Nations membership, and the need to enhance the Council's credibility, authority and legitimacy.

The Australian Government's view has long been that expansion in both categories of membership is

needed to restore balance and equity to the composition of the Council. New permanent seats should be assumed by the under-represented developing regions of the world. New permanent seats should also be allocated to the major industrialized Powers best able to contribute to the maintenance of international peace and security. Equally importantly, other Members of the United Nations should be given the opportunity to contribute directly to the work of the Council through periodic participation as elected members. Expansion of the non-permanent membership would enhance the representative nature of the Council, enabling it to act genuinely on behalf of the whole membership.

Australia has long voiced concerns about the veto and continues to argue that there must be limitations on its use. Of course, all permanent members of the Council, old and new, must remain accountable for their performance, and to this end any new arrangements for the Council should be reviewed after 10 or 15 years.

Regrettably, discussion on Security Council reform has failed to reach agreement on a package of reforms in the six years since the Open-ended Working Group was established. The impasse is disappointing, and I hope that this session will give new impetus to the reform effort. It is clear from statements at the Millennium Summit, and during this debate, that there is strong support for reform. Renewed commitment and flexibility are needed from all sides.

In the recent debate about United Nations reform, one key element has largely been missing. I refer to the United Nations electoral groups. The electoral groups were established to ensure that there was fair and equitable representation on United Nations bodies, so that all Members who wanted to make a contribution to United Nations decision-making would have an opportunity to do so. Now that three decades have passed since the formalization of the present groups, it is time that we focused on their relevance to present and future geopolitical realities.

The current group system reflects the geopolitics of the 1960s. Since that time, more than 60 nations have joined the United Nations, leading to significant disparities between the size of groupings and an inadequate level of representation for some subregions. In addition, the original rationale for the configuration of the electoral groups has eroded, creating dissonance in the way many Member States organize themselves politically and electorally.

The previous realignment of groups in 1963 was a long and difficult process, impelled by significant changes to the United Nations system after the entry of many newly independent States from Africa and Asia. I recognize that group reconfiguration is no easy matter, and accept that change now will be similarly complex. For that very reason, we should delay no longer in commencing a serious debate of these issues. While there are many possible configurations for revised electoral groupings, and many sensitivities around altering the status quo, the dramatic global changes since the current system came into force have created historical anomalies that cry out to be redressed. Australia looks forward to working with others to achieve that goal.

As part of the Australian Government's commitment to a strong and relevant United Nations, we recently completed a review of the United Nations human rights committee system, with the objective of improving its effectiveness. The review proceeded from our Government's commitment to the international promotion and protection of human rights, and a firm belief that the United Nations has a central role to play.

Australia has a proud human rights record, and we take our international rights and obligations seriously. We are party to both human rights Covenants and to the four conventions. Within Australia, which has a strong civil society, human rights are protected by a range of key civil and political mechanisms, including a strong democratic tradition, our Constitution, an independent judiciary, a free press and wide-ranging anti-discrimination legislation. Internationally, Australia is a strong proponent of the universal application of human rights standards and is committed to continued support for international human rights protection.

We are concerned that the committees established to monitor international compliance with human rights treaties are beginning to lose credibility and effectiveness because of the way they operate. It is also important that the international protection system work efficiently and effectively so that democratic countries, such as Australia, which have a proud record of extending generous humanitarian assistance can continue to have the confidence and support of their

own domestic constituencies for such humanitarian protection.

Australia's review found that the committees need to adopt a more consistent approach to their role and understand the pitfalls of simply accepting without analysis the submissions put before them by non-governmental organizations. It is important that adequate recognition be given to the role and views of Governments which are democratically elected and which take their treaty commitments and reporting obligations seriously. The committees also need to be more balanced and strategic about targeting key human rights offenders and avoid unfairly focusing their criticism on countries with good human rights records.

For some years now Australia, together with a number of other countries, including Canada, New Zealand and Norway, has been advocating reform of the treaty committees. Most recently, the Australian Mission to the United Nations in Geneva hosted a meeting of about 20 countries to discuss treaty committee reform. The United Nations itself has also recognized the need for reform of the treaty committee system, and Australia has been fully supportive of these international reform efforts.

Australia now intends to broaden such efforts by spearheading a high-level diplomatic initiative to garner broad support for reforms to improve the functioning of the committees and professionalize their operations. Reforms could include the provision of adequate resources to the human rights treaty committees, improvements in their working methods, standardized rules of procedure when considering States' reports and better consultation between the committees themselves to coordinate reporting timetables and to facilitate cooperative work on reform issues.

But Australia does not have a monopoly on good ideas, and we want to work closely with United Nations officials and with like-minded countries to make the treaty committee system work more effectively for the good of all Member States and for the protection of human rights.

We will therefore be talking widely with others to develop concrete proposals for reform. We will raise these issues in the General Assembly, at the Commission on Human Rights and in other appropriate meetings. We also think that the regular meetings of States parties to the six human rights treaties should discuss reform issues and provide guidance to the respective committees on their working methods.

Australia wants to maximize the effectiveness of the treaty bodies. We will not shy away from our responsibilities, but will press for the reforms that are needed to make the system work well and achieve its objectives. If reform does not occur, the committee system will increasingly be ignored and made redundant. That would be a setback for the cause of human rights.

I now turn to the matter of peacekeeping and the maintenance of international security. Australia has a long and honourable tradition as a participant in United Nations peacekeeping operations, most recently in East Timor, and I believe that the strength of our commitment is reflected in the recent appointment by the Secretary-General of Australian Major-General Tim Ford as his Military Adviser. The experience of the 1990s has clearly shown that the ability of the United Nations to meet an expanding and increasingly complex range of peacekeeping demands is under strain. The decade witnessed some important successes in peacekeeping, notably in East Timor, but also some smaller and frankly rather unheralded operations. It also saw some tragic failures, the costs of which were often measured in human lives.

I commend the Secretary-General's commitment to blunt scrutiny and review of the United Nations performance, including the reports on Srebrenica and Rwanda. We particularly commend his initiative in convening the Brahimi Panel on United Nations Peace Operations. The Brahimi report (A/55/305) is a landmark document, setting out a blueprint for modernizing the United Nations peacekeeping and related functions. We must move expeditiously to consider its recommendations.

Let me highlight briefly five points that, in Australia's view, are among the most significant lessons of recent experiences.

First, military intervention must be used only as a last resort. All efforts must be made to find peaceful solutions. In this context, we welcome the Brahimi report's emphasis on preventive action and peace-building.

Secondly, when the United Nations is deployed, there must be a peace to keep. There are real dangers in sending troops indefinitely into harm's way in the

absence of a clear peace plan and reasonable prospects of achieving it. Disputing parties must be committed to peace and must be held accountable for their actions.

Thirdly, peace operations must have a mandate from the Security Council that is appropriate to the job they are being asked to do. If the environment is hostile, they must be appropriately equipped and able to project credible force.

Fourthly, deployment must take place quickly once a decision is taken by the Security Council. Delays can lead to the further deterioration of a situation and can cost lives. The Brahimi report offers a number of useful ideas to speed deployment which merit careful consideration.

Fifthly, United Nations peace operations must have a clear exit strategy. This is linked in particular to the clarity of Council mandates: as the Brahimi report rightly stresses, mandates must be clear, credible and achievable. It is also linked to the efficacy of accompanying peace processes and peace-building efforts.

We welcome the attention given to these issues in the Brahimi report. We also support the point that the United Nations must be given the resources it needs to carry out the demands that we make of it. There is no question that the Department of Peacekeeping Operations needs to be strengthened and reformed. Ultimately, it is our responsibility, as Member States, to support a stronger and more effective United Nations peacekeeping capacity. This includes placing the financing of peacekeeping on a surer footing and paying our assessed contributions in full and on time.

I cannot conclude without referring to the question of East Timor. When I addressed this Assembly one year ago East Timor was in the throes of the most appalling violence at the hands of a brutal and lawless militia. Since then important progress has been made in restoring security and building the foundations of an independent East Timor. Australia pays tribute to the men and women of the International Force in East Timor and of the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor for their commitment and, in too many cases, their sacrifice.

East Timor faces a long and difficult path to peace and prosperity. Australia is playing a major role in the territory's reconstruction through the United Nations and other organizations, as well as bilaterally. We are committed for the long term to helping the East Timorese build their emerging nation not only for the benefit of the East Timorese, but in the interests of stability and security in our region.

Regrettably, the pro-integration militia continue to pose a significant threat to security and stability. Intimidation and violence against Timorese refugees and humanitarian aid personnel in the camps on the East-West Timor border must be halted. The killing of workers of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) earlier this month deserves the world's strongest condemnation. Australia reiterates its call on Indonesia to fulfil its responsibility to provide effective security in West Timor, including by bringing to an end militia activity, bringing to justice those responsible for crimes, creating the necessary conditions for the return of UNHCR and resolving the refugee situation. We urge the Indonesian authorities to take all possible steps in this direction, including cooperating with the proposed Security Council mission.

If the United Nations is to remain relevant and credible, it must work on its strengths and maintain a strong commitment to a continuing programme of reform and renewal. The challenges that face the Organization are formidable, but not insurmountable. The need for change is clear and urgent, but I believe that it is not beyond the ingenuity and good will of our generation to emulate our predecessors in grasping the reform nettle.

At the Millennium Summit the world's leaders highlighted the need for the United Nations to meet the challenges of the new century. Let us heed their call, and work together with renewed determination and commitment to make this Organization more representative and much more effective.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.